



Testimony in Support of H.B. 5033, An Act Addressing the Needs of Food-Insecure Students at Public Institutions of Higher Education

Dear Chairs Elliott and Slap, Vice Chairs Turco and Flexer, Ranking Members Haines and Witkos, and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

My name is Miles Quarterman and I am a resident of New Haven. I'm writing to communicate my strong support for H.B. 5033, an Act addressing the needs of food-insecure students at public institutions of higher education. This bill would require public institutions of higher education to assess and address food insecurity among students and to increase access to the supplemental nutrition assistance program for eligible students at institutions of higher education.

Black and low-income students are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity. A study done by the University of Connecticut estimated that around 35% of Connecticut college students suffer from food insecurities. Amongst these alarming statistics, black students constitute fifty-eight percent, which is 19% higher than the overall rate for students identifying as White or Caucasian. Students experiencing food insecurity have a lower average GPA and higher rates of depression and nutrition deficiencies.

One of the most prescient issues is SNAP eligibility for students. Students enrolled more than half-time must work at least 20 hours a week to be eligible for SNAP. But with the loss of on-campus work-study jobs and the closure of restaurants and other service sector businesses, many college students no longer qualify for SNAP benefits and lack an abundance of other off-campus options. It is already difficult enough for low-income students to attend college and without SNAP benefits we are further dissuading students from pursuing higher education. One in four students have had to take out loans to cover the cost of food, and one-third know someone who dropped out because they couldn't afford to eat, according to a recent study by Swipe Out Hunger and Chegg.

This bill would help address many of these issues. And at least 6 other states have implemented, 10 have introduced, proposed, or are debating similar bills. The bill would start a Swipe Out Hunger program. For campuses that have meal plans, students should have the option to donate their extra meals to their peers facing food insecurity on campus, enabling these students access to a warm, nourishing meal at a dining hall. It would establish food pantries. Through an on-campus pantry or partnership with a local food bank, students should be able to regularly access food. And it would create SNAP enrollment opportunities. Campuses should

designate a person to ensure students have access to accurate information about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), including how to apply.

In conclusion, I urge you to address the needs of food-insecure students at public institutions of higher education. The consequences of food insecurity impact their ability to perform well in and out of school and have a life-long impact on their development and livelihood. I urge you to favorably vote this bill out of the Higher Education Committee so that these individuals have a chance at fulfilling their best potential.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Miles Quatterman
New Haven, CT

ARGUMENTS AND STATISTICS FOR H.B. 5033
AN ACT ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF FOOD-INSECURE STUDENTS
AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

What is the purpose of H.B. 5033?

To require public institutions of higher education to assess and address food insecurity among students and to increase access to the supplemental nutrition assistance program by eligible students at institutions of higher education.

Why should this bill be passed?

I: The Impact

General Statistic

- According to *The UConn Today*, a survey that found 35% of students at UConn Storrs suffer from food insecurity, with higher numbers at regional campuses.
- Furthermore, a study at Eastern Connecticut State University found that approximately 35 percent of students reported not having access to enough nutritious food and a study at Southern Connecticut State found that about 30 percent of undergraduate college students were food insecure.
- Murphy also indicated that “Studies have also shown that food and housing insecurity often go hand-in-hand. One study, the *Hunger on Campus* report, found that 64 percent of food insecure students also reported experiencing some type of housing insecurity.”
- Nationally, at least 40 percent of college students experience food insecurity before graduating, according to a 2018 study released by The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, which surveyed over 160,000 students at 120 colleges and universities across the United States.
- The GAO review of 31 national studies provided some insight despite limitations: 25 estimated that food insecurity affects between 9 percent to well over 50 percent of college students. Nearly two dozen of those studies estimated food insecurity rates of more than 30 percent.

Students of Color Are Disproportionately Impacted by Food Insecurity

- A representative campus-wide sample (n=792) found that roughly 30% of students were food insecure, based upon a single validated question about the student’s experience over the past year. Food insecure students had lower GPAs (3.09 vs. 3.25), a higher proportion had a depression diagnosis (22.4 vs. 14.3), and a higher proportion ate fewer than three servings of fruits and vegetables per day (14.4% vs. 7.3%) compared to food secure students. A marginally higher proportion of food insecure students had an anxiety diagnosis (22.8% vs. 14.3%)
- The overall rate of food insecurity among students identifying as African American or Black is 58%, which is approximately eight percentage points higher than the overall rate for Hispanic or Latinx students, and 19 percentage points higher than the overall rate for students identifying as White or Caucasian.

II: The lack of SNAP Eligibility

Background

Students enrolled at least half-time at a higher education institution are generally ineligible for SNAP unless they qualify for an exemption. These exemptions include participating in a (1) state or federally financed work study program and (2) SNAP employment and training program or another eligible program.

The Problem

- Students enrolled more than half-time must work at least 20 hours a week to be eligible for SNAP.
- But with the loss of on-campus work-study jobs and the closure of restaurants and other service sector businesses, many college students are being hit doubly hard--losing income as well as their SNAP benefits, with their route to eligibility cut off.
- A GAO report from last year showed almost 2 million college students who are potentially eligible have not reported receiving SNAP, many of whom are dissuaded from even applying because of the cryptic language that explains which students can get benefits.
- One in four students have had to take out loans to cover the cost of food, and one-third know someone who dropped out because they couldn't afford to eat, according to a recent study by Swipe Out Hunger and Chegg.
- Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students have been disproportionately impacted by the economic fallout of COVID-19, burdened with higher rates of basic needs insecurity compared to their white peers as well as a higher drop-out rate.
- Our country has continually failed to invest in higher education for low-income students, who are disproportionately students of color, despite the fact that at least 60% of new jobs require some education beyond high school.

III Increasing Demand for College Campus Food Banks, But Supplies Are Not Enough

- At University of Connecticut (UConn), Husky Market was launched in 2019 as USG purchased groceries and distributed them to students in need.
- Gordon Plouffe, a member of the CT Food Justice Project, who is at the helm of Manchester Community College's Cougar Pantry, said on average they serve 6,000 students a semester.
- Demand at Cougar Pantry at Manchester Community College has grown from 108 visits in the spring of 2016 to roughly 27,000 visits between Sept. 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019.
- At Middlesex Community College in Middletown, the number of unduplicated students served by the Magic Food Bus, the school's food pantry, increased by 68% during the 2018-19 academic year.

IV. Past bill that addressed this problem

- The federal Consolidated Appropriations Act 2021 temporarily extends SNAP eligibility to students enrolled at least half-time at a higher education institution who either:
 - (1) are eligible to participate in a state or federally funded work-study program during the academic year or
 - (2) have an expected family contribution of zero in the academic year and meet all other SNAP eligibility criteria. This benefit extension will remain in effect until 30 days after the COVID-19 public health emergency ends.
- Reducing food insecurity among college students, however, will require more than a temporary change to SNAP eligibility and enrollment assistance. Additional steps need to be taken at the federal, state, and institutional levels to increase students' access to nutritious food.

Precedents and Practical Benefits

Connecticut Food Insecure System In Comparison to Other States

Hayes' Bill: 'Closing the College 5 Hunger Gap Act of 2021

- Require the government to inform students about their SNAP eligibility through the financial assistance form known as FAFSA.

Similar Bills in Other States

Student Food Security Act of 2021

- A bicameral legislation that addresses food insecurity on college campuses by enabling more low-income college students to access the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and pushing the federal government, states, and colleges and universities to take a more proactive role in addressing student food insecurity.
- Sponsored by Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), Chris Murphy (D-Conn.), Alex Padilla (D-Calif.), and Bernard Sanders (I-Vt.), and Representatives Jahana Hayes (D-Conn.), Al Lawson (D-Fla.), and Norma Torres (D-Calif.).

The Opportunity to Address College Hunger Act, H.R. 3362

- Bridge an information gap and help students access the benefits available to them by requiring institutions of higher education to inform students in the Federal Work Study (FWS) program that they may qualify for SNAP and provide support for the application process. Sponsored by Representatives Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) and Mark Takano (D-CA).

An Act establishing the Massachusetts Hunger-Free Campus Initiative

- Hearing in the House on Monday, April 4th, 2022.
- **Purpose:** establish an office of capacity building services (to be known hereafter as "the office"), whose mission is to support institutions of public higher education, to build their

capacity to understand and address existing gaps in addressing student food insecurity and hunger on their campus, using interventions that reflect best practices.

- To become a “Hunger-Free Campus”, schools would have to complete five initiatives each academic year -- designating a staff member as Hunger-Free Campus Coordinator; establishing a Hunger-Free Campus Task Force to determine the campus’ priority activities, with at least two student members who have experienced food insecurity; conducting an annual hunger awareness activity; assessing the need to provide access to on-campus food distribution; and notifying students who receive needs-based financial aid “of their potential eligibility to receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits, and other federal and state nutrition benefits available to said student or dependents.”

Senate Bill 351 in Illinois Senate: An Educational program offered at a community college under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 that could be a component of a SNAP Employment and Training (E&T Program)

The Hunger-Free Campus Act

- First passed in California (July 2017) and has passed in New Jersey (May 2019), Maryland (April 2021), Minnesota (June 2021), and Massachusetts (December 2021).
- Has been introduced in New York, Pennsylvania , Washington, **Florida**, Illinois, **North Carolina**, West Virginia, Virginia, and **Oklahoma**.
- Start a Swipe Out Hunger program: For campuses that have meal plans, students should have the option to donate their extra meals to their peers facing food insecurity on campus, enabling these students access to a warm, nourishing meal at a dining hall.
- Establish Food Pantries: Through an on-campus pantry or partnership with a local food bank, students should be able to regularly access food.
- Create SNAP Enrollment Opportunities: Campuses should designate a person to ensure students have access to accurate information about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), including how to apply.

H.R.1919 - EATS Act of 2021

- Introduced on 03/16/2021 by Rep. Jimmy Gomez (D-CA-34)
- This bill expands eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to students attending institutions of higher education.